

Love and Charity

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Summary: AU scene from "Roz, a Loan." When Niles learns that Daphne has been struggling financially, he knows he needs to help. But can he help her see past her pride and accept the gift he offers?
Birthday one-shot for Leigh Ann (leighann415).

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****Author's Note: ****When I saw this scene from "Roz, a Loan," I knew there was something I could do with it. And what better time to post it than as a birthday gift for Leigh Ann (****leighann415****)'s birthday! :)

Niles watched as Daphne left the room. Before Frasier could stop him, he followed her down the hall to her room. He caught up to her just as she'd reached the door to her bedroom. "Daphne?"

She turned. "I know I had no right to speak to your brother that way, but I just get so sick of hearing him prattle on about things, and sometimes I can't hold me tongue."

"That's quite all right. Even I think Frasier's gone a bit over the line this time. But that isn't what I wanted to say to you."

"Well, what is it, then?" Daphne asked.

"I had no idea you were having financial difficulties. I wish you'd let me know you were struggling. I would've been glad to help you out," Niles said. He hated the thought of her having to reuse teabags just to scrape by on what his brother paid her. He knew she was grossly underpaid, considering she not only helped with his father's therapy, but also had to put up with Frasier and his demanding tendencies.

"That's very sweet of you, but friends lending money to friends doesn't work out. It would just be too awkward." Daphne smiled. She

should have known Dr. Crane would offer to help out.

"I didn't say it had to be a loan," Niles said. He would gladly give her the money outright. In fact, it was all he could do not to reach into his breast pocket and get out his checkbook right now.

"I grew up poor, and I learned that I don't like taking charity. I can fend for myself," Daphne said. That was partly why she'd come to America in the first place, to have a chance at a life better than she'd had back in Manchester, but even she had never dreamed of working in a place like this.

Niles sighed. "But you don't have to be so brave. There's no shame in asking for help. Especially from someone who cares about you."

"Thank you, Dr. Crane. You're very sweet." She hugged him tightly.

Niles sighed, feeling the warmth of her body next to his. And the scent of her shampoo was literally heavenly. "I just didn't like you feeling all alone," Niles said, when he finally let her go.

"I suppose I should've spoken up to your brother sooner. But he's my boss, and he's unemployed himself. I just couldn't risk it. I mean, what if he were to decide your father doesn't really need me?"

"Frasier would never do a thing like that," Niles replied immediately. "Being out of work is a hardship for him, but he's hardly destitute. We'd find a way to keep you here, no matter what." _I know I'd do whatever it took_, he thought.

"Thank you," Daphne said. "I haven't wanted to think about that possibility, much less say it out loud. But I always feel like I can tell you anything, and you listen. It's so nice to have a friend like that."

"That's how I feel about you," Niles said. "You're a wonderful person, the way you care about everyone so much. I don't know what Iâ€¦|...I mean we'd do without you."

"Oh, I have a feeling you'd manage. But your father and brother are another story." She laughed. The other two Cranes would be at each other's throats if she weren't there to keep the peace.

"That's not true," Niles said. "I know that I don't live here, but I depend on seeing you every day as much as Dad does. I honestly don't know what I'd do without you in my life."

"That's awfully nice to hear." Daphne leaned forward, gently kissing his cheek.

Niles wished he could pause time, and savor the feeling of her lips on his cheek for all eternity. But that wasn't how it worked. Suddenly, a thought crossed his mind. Would he really be satisfied to simply be her friend? He loved her, of course. He loved every moment he got to spend with her. But having her see him as nothing more than a good friend was painful. Was it worth the risk to reveal what was in his heart? This whole conversation had started because Daphne

spoke up. She had no fear in doing so. Maybe Niles should follow her lead. "Daphne?"

"Yes?"

"Since you said that we're friends, and friends are supposed to tell each other things, there's something I need to say. I've been putting it off for far too long already." Niles could feel his heart pounding. He knew he'd remember this moment forever. Either it would be the moment he'd ruined everything with Daphne, or it would be the start of the happiest time in his life.

"Are you all right?" Daphne asked, when he stopped talking suddenly, as if he'd lost his train of thought.

"Yes," Niles said. "I'm just trying to figure out the best way to tell you this. It's a bit of a risk."

"If there's something you want to say, just say it. The little incident I just had out there is a good example of what can happen when you hold things in."

"All right, then. There's a reason I hated to hear that you were having trouble with money. I want to help you, but not just as a friend."

"Well, what other way is there?" Daphne asked. But, a second later, the light dawned. "Dr. Crane!"

"Yes, Daphne. I want to do everything possible to make you happy. You should never have to worry about making ends meet."

"If this is another way to try to give me charity, I don't want it."

"This has nothing to do with charity. I've felt this way since the first time you smiled at me. Knowing you're struggling only makes me want to help you even more."

Daphne looked at him for a long moment, trying to decide if he was telling the truth. But something in his eyes said that he was. She was so used to handling things on her own. It was something she'd learned growing up. But now, maybe she didn't have to. She wasn't sure just yet what to say to him. She would have to get past the shock before she could think about words. But that didn't mean she had to leave him waiting. She hugged him tightly around the waist. Immediately, she felt safe and warm as she never had before. "Thank you, Dr. Crane," she whispered.

Niles could hardly believe this was happening. He held her close, once again smelling the sweet scent of her shampoo. "I should be thanking you," he said, kissing her hair. Niles knew he'd been right, he would remember this moment forever, and for the best possible reason.

****The End****

End
file.